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## Editorials

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IRVINE H. PAGE, M.D., Editor

### **Needed—National Academy of Medicine**

All of you are sufficiently aware of the important trend linking the destiny of medicine to government. It has been growing rapidly in the past five years, and to some the rate is alarming. Government is deeply involved in research, education, hospital construction, disease prevention programs, international relations, care of the young and of the old—in fact, just about every facet of medicine. I have pointed out many times that both the advice government receives and the intellectual relationships among government officials, research workers, and practicing physicians are so chaotic that a meeting of the minds on a democratic basis is all but impossible. Indeed, this chaos is highlighted by such examples as the grumbling hostility between the American Medical Association and Washington. But even within the AMA, the separation of thought between general practitioners and specialists has been called by Morris Fishbein, "A House Divided." Recently, even business has gotten into the act with hard words flying between the drug manufacturers and the Food and Drug Administration.

At the moment there seems little chance that the varied general and special societies to which most physicians belong will close ranks and supply both the advice and the persuasion necessary to make decisions of wisdom and put these policies into practice (MM, Feb. 3, 1964, p. 75). There are just too many societies, and their organizational structures are too antiquated and cumbersome. Few have kept abreast of even such relatively "simple" problems as the vast increase in numbers of physicians, quite aside from the vast financial resources and their accompanying problems (MM, April 27, 1964, p. 73). Reluctantly, I recognize that my hope for internal reorganization to face up to major problems is unlikely to occur.

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Engineers have at last recognized their problem and are now in the process of doing something about it. It has just been announced that a new academy is to be founded, a "National Academy of Engineering," to give suitable recognition to engineers, to bring the benefits of high quality advice to government, and to exert influence on national affairs. In short, a quasi-governmental agency may be created that will be adequate to cope with modern problems of the effects on government of engineers and vice versa.

I have been at some pains to point out to you the inadequacy of medical representation. One physician is on a 17-man presidential science advisory board! The great National Institutes of Health complex is represented chiefly by people beholden to government for their positions and salaries. The National Academy of Science has no medical category at all, contrary to usual opinion. A few lobbyists, an occasional roving physician asked to testify before congressional committees—and you have about had it. This is simply not enough, and even what there is is not good enough.

As a beginning, I propose establishment of a National Academy of Medicine. Located in Washington, truly representative of excellence in all branches of medicine—scientific and administrative—large enough to fulfill the requirements of representation and to meet the protean demands of the modern world of science, quasi-governmental, carefully structured to provide means of effectively using a working membership. I would envision such an organization as democratic to the point that status is not the prime object of membership but rather is used as a symbol of excellence, coupled with paying the price by active work for an earned respect. Such an organization would require much time and effort on the part of its membership if it is to fulfill its destiny. It should not wait to be challenged before undertaking study of problems. Its administration, both lay and medical, must have drive, flexibility, and above all enthusiasm for our problems.

Despite the almost frightening scope and multiplicity of problems that face medicine, sci-

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ence, and government, there is an internal unity within the disciplines of medicine which makes an academy both a reasonable and a logical outgrowth from the present organizations.

The National Academy of Sciences itself serves a useful purpose, which would not be jeopardized by the establishment of a National Academy of Medicine. It is even possible that the Division of Medical Sciences of the National Research Council might serve as a major working arm of both academies. A major problem in establishment of a new academy which will have the required stature to perform the functions which it should serve will be in the determination of its initial membership. It should not be organized under "political" influence of other societies and associations.

I would hope that a National Academy could provide a nidus around which some harmony could develop while concurrently providing the scaffolding for medicine to probe its intellectual, economic, and administrative future. We have already spent too much time and effort, either in retrospect or in living for the moment. Now is the time for prospect.

IRVINE H. PAGE